

## [John Proctor]

26072

Life Couch - History Tallahassee John Proctor

[??] Bosworth

Tallahassee, Fla.

John Proctor

John Proctor is an outstanding representative of the negro race in its history and progress in the south. In his ninety-four years of life he has traveled along road, from freedom to slavery, from slavery to a seat in the Legislature of the state of Florida, and back to the obscurity of an old age pension.

Perhaps in no other era could John's transition have taken place. He has seen a Confederacy fall and a United Nation come into being.

And, he has, in true negroid fashion, watched these momentous changes with little interest and with only a sketchy idea of the part he played in a nation's drama.

Born in 1844, to George Proctor, a free man who came to the States from Santo Domingo, John was born free and was first sold into slavery in 1850 at the age of six.

In 1849, George Proctor heard, as did many others, the call of easy money. He sailed from St. Marks bound for California and the great gold rush. He left his wife and six children behind promising to send for them. This promise was never fulfilled and no money ever arrived for their upkeep. It has been said that he abandoned his family. John, however, is most emphatic in his denial of this statement.

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"He left us," John says. "With a white man he trusted. Pa never ment for us to be sold. We were born free!" C. 4 — 12121140 Fla.

Whatever the truth of the story it is an indubitable fact that in [1850?], John, his mother, his sisters and his brother were sold at public auction.

Mr. H.Y. Rutgles bought John and trained him as a houseservant. Some years later John came into the possession of Mr. Matthew Lively.

In Mr. Lively's drug store he worked as handy man for 2 eight years. He washed bottles, ran errands, and as John says learned to roll two pills between the index finger and thumb of each hand simultaneously and as, "quick as any cat could wink it's eye."

When asked about his memories of slavery, John was vague.

"It didn't seem much different than any other time. I've always worked hard to live."

"When were you set free," we asked?

John's chuckle was slow and deep. "Not 'til the end. When Mr. Lincoln set all negers free."

"What did you think of the Civil War?"

"Why I didn't think about it. I don't have much truck with wars. No, I didn't hear the guns of the Battle of Natural Bridge. Mr. Lively sent all his folks to Georgia so the yankees would not get us."

And so it seems that the heart-rending war fought between the North and the South ran it's tragic gauntlet with little interest paid it by John. When asked about his reactions to the World War the same indifference was encounted. This attitude is typical of the negro race The world can shake on its foundations but as long as they personally are

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not touched it is of no moment to them. Negroes have solved the problem of worry by complete indifference.

It was not until after the war between the states that John had any schooling. Then at the instigation of a Mr. Lewis, a white man who took an interest in him, John attended night school. He went about as far as the seventh grade. In later years this schooling stood him in good stead. As a result he taught school in country schools around Tallahassee for several years.

John has been married twice. Both wives are now dead. By his first wife he had seven children. It is with one of his daughters that 3 he now lives.

Except for the school teaching and for the years he served in the Legislature John has worked as a brick mason. Many of the most prominent homes in Tallahassee were built by John.

Perhaps the most out-standing thing that has happened to John in his long life, is that after the war during 1871 to 1885 he served in the House and in the Senate of the Legislature. John the only negro to ever serve from Leon County was put in as a Republican vote when the Republicans were fighting hard to keep control of the state of Florida. During the time John served he made no unusual speeches and no great action can be contributed attributed to him. But he was a Senator and he was a Representative, and he is very proud of the memory. The fact that he was a pawn used by other men has never crossed his mind.

John lives now with his daughter and his son-in-law in a four room house which is in better condition than most negro houses in this section. He pays no rent and for his personal needs he has a ten dollar a month pension. He lives about two miles from town and almost every day he walks the distance into the city to visit with his friends. He attends the Episcopal church and never misses a Sunday service. He has never been to a show, but

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he reads a great many books. At the present time he is reading Pilgrims Progress for the second time. He read it first thirty years ago, he says.

John has a senerity that is not entirely due to his age or to his race. In talking to him the thing that is most noticed is the complete absence of fear in his make -up. In a time when the whole world seems to be ruled by fear, John fears nothing. He never has.